

instance, if he understands Hebrew,—and while that is going on some one places a pencil in his hand and whispers in his ear. What you have called the 'subconscious self' communicates by writing, and the normal, conscious personality is unaware that he is writing."

"But how can we engage her mind so absorbingly?" Valeska asked hopelessly. "We don't know her language, whatever it may be."

ASTRO paced the room for several minutes, thinking deeply. He stopped occasionally to look at the girl fixedly, and resumed his contemplation. Finally he went up to her, examined her palms, and his face lighted up.

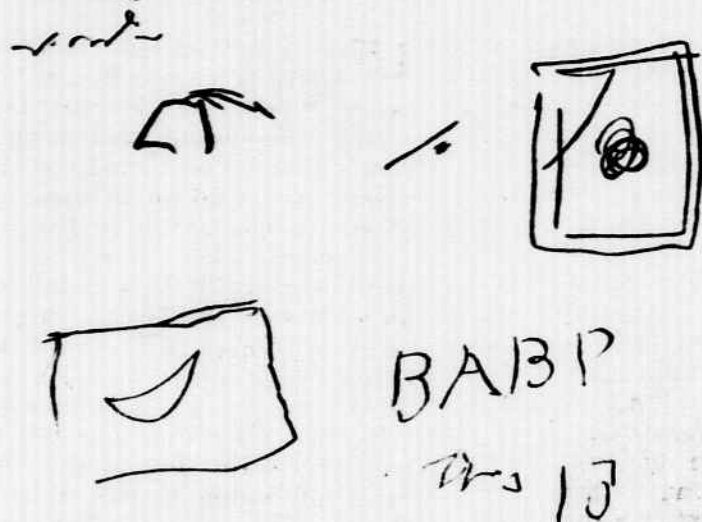
"I believe she's musical!" he said.

Valeska stared.

"But then—" "We'll see. Have the pencil ready to put in her hand, and the paper on the table by it. Watch her closely, and see if she is affected by the music. If she seems to be, give her the pencil."

With that, he walked to the piano, sat down, and began to play the Tenth Rhapsody of Liszt. As he swung into the abandon of its more temperamental passages, he seemed himself to be absorbed, to lose himself in the intricate harmonies. He was a skilled and artistic musician. He swayed to and fro, giving himself up physically and mentally to the passion and the beauty of the themes, and it was not till the echoes of the last divine chords had ceased reverberating that he slowly turned on the piano stool and seemed to awaken.

"I've got it!" cried Valeska, and, springing up, she ran over and handed him a sheet of paper. It was partly covered with rude drawings, apparently meaningless rough sketches, mingled with attempts at lettering.



He took the sheet eagerly, and went to the table under the electric lamp to scrutinize the figures.

"It's not very promising material, is it?" said Valeska.

"On the contrary, it's a fine beginning; only it will take a bit of doing to make it out."

"I see the fatal 13 has put in its appearance again."

The girl, who had seemed to be in a sort of stupor, now leaned over the table and inspected the sheet. At sight of the figures 13 she gave a moan, and threw her arms about Valeska, trembling all over.

"Poor girl!" said Astro. "I'm afraid there's something big back of all this. She's a Turk, or an Armenian, or a Syrian. See the Turkish flag that she has roughly drawn here? . . . Babi . . . Wait!"

He had risen to go to the bookcase, when the girl reached over and would have seized the paper, had not Valeska prevented her. Astro turned to ejaculate: "Babi!" and again, "Baha-Ullah!"

The girl quivered; but did not speak.

"She may be a member of the Bahai sect, followers of the Bab, the Incarnation of the Almighty, whose religion is not tolerated by the Faithful in Persia. They are all kept to one city, where they live like primitive Christians; indeed, their faith is a mixture of Christianity and Mohammedanism. We'll see. Valeska, she's had enough for to-night. You must take her home and take care of her, and bring her back to-morrow. Before then I must stay up and think it out."

FOR hours after Valeska had left with her ward, Astro walked up and down the length of the great, dim studio. Occasionally he threw himself at full length on the big couch in concentrated thought.



"All Right," Said the Evil Looking Man. "Three Dollars a Week."

At intervals he stood erect, his eyes fixed in abstraction on some trophy of arms on the wall, or gazing into the lucent transparency of his crystal ball. Once or twice he sat down at the table and gazed long at the hieroglyphic marks made on the paper by the strange girl. At three in the morning, he partially undressed and lay down on the couch to sleep. He rose at seven, bathed, and went outdoors for a walk.

WHEN he returned, an hour later, Valeska was in the studio alone. Her eyes were red; she seemed ashamed and self-reproachful.

"The girl has disappeared!" she exclaimed the moment Astro appeared. "When I woke up, she wasn't in the room. She must have risen and dressed while I was asleep. But I found this." She held out a short, curved dagger, in a morocco sheath.

Astro, withdrawing the blade, found it was engraved with an Arabic inscription. He read the motto aloud:

"For the heart of a dog, the tongue of the serpent!" "Ah!" he commented, "this may help some. Our little friend apparently isn't so timid as she appeared. But, somehow, this doesn't look like the property of a Babist. In spite of their many persecutions, I believe they are usually non-resistants. Well, Valeska, we'll have to find the girl, now! Come along with me immediately."

His private brougham was already at the door in waiting. Both jumped in, and as they drove to the southern end of the city Astro explained:

"There are two Syrian quarters in New York. One is in Brooklyn, the other down on Washington-st., near the Battery. We'll go to that one first, and see what we can find there. The Turkish flag reminds me that that is often hung outside stores where they sell Turkish rugs. We'll try that clue afterward."

Reaching Washington-st., the two left the brougham and walked toward the Battery, past rows of squalid houses. At every corner Astro stopped and gazed about deliberately.

FINALLY, he seized Valeska's arm with a quick gesture. "Look at that sign!" he exclaimed.

On West-st., facing the Hudson River, but with its rear abutting on a vacant lot on Washington-st., was a huge soap factory. Painted on the dead wall was a sign whose letters were eight or ten feet in height.

Valeska read it aloud: "Use Babrock's Brown Soap." She stopped and looked at Astro in bewilderment. "What about it?"

He drew the drawing from his pocket and pointed out the lettering. "Don't you see?" he cried. "BABIP! That's a part of the sign, surely. Look at those two buildings on each side of the sign. Now look at this row of houses. From some one of those windows the sign must present the appearance she has drawn. Making the drawing subconsciously, she has merely copied something with which she has been familiar,—seeing it, probably, every day. We must find the window from which the sign looks just like her drawing."

He looked at the sign again carefully, estimating its height and the relative position of the two buildings whose roofs would cut off the first and last group of letters. A rough triangulation led him to a house

in the lower part of which was a cobbler's shop. This he entered.

"Are there any rooms to let in this house?" he asked of the man at the bench.

The man nodded. "Go up stairs and ask at the second floor," he replied. "You see Garbon Soumissin; he keeps the house."

Up stairs went Astro and Valeska, and plunged into a dark, narrow hallway. A doorway opened part way and a whiskered man looked out. He had an evil face, blotched with red spots, and wore a fez. He was smoking a Turkish cigarette.

"What you want here?" "I'd like to look at your front room, third floor."

A murmur of voices came from inside the room. The man turned and growled some foreign oath. Then he turned and looked at Astro with a vicious inquisition.

"All right," he said at last: "you go up. Door open. Three dollars a week."

ASTRO waited for no more; but ran up the stairs, followed by his assistant. Once out of earshot, he stopped for a moment to pull out the paper again, and pointed to the first drawing on the sheet. "Fez," he said, and looked at her meaningly.

"The old man down stairs?" "Probably. Now we'll find out what they have been up to."

The hall bed room was incredibly dirty, but contained nothing but a cot bed with evil coverings, a chair, and a crazy washstand, over which hung a square, cracked mirror. Astro first went to the grimy window and looked out. He pointed to the sign, and Valeska followed his eyes. One of the buildings across the street cut off the first word, "use," and the other, with a small dormer, obscured all after "bab" with the exception of the upper half of the R. It showed, in fact, precisely as the girl had drawn it.

"This is the room, all right. Now let's examine it."

He took up the chair first, and looked it over carefully. Then he pointed to marks on the sides of the back, where the paint was worn smooth. The marks were about an inch wide, and similar ones showed on the legs and on the side rails of the seat.

"This is where straps have chafed the paint," he commented. "She was undoubtedly fastened securely. Did you notice where the marks or bruises were on her?"

"Yes; they were bad enough for me to remember. There were red marks on her wrists and on her arms below her shoulders; and her arms were almost covered with bruises; but small ones."

"Oh, they pinched her, no doubt. Undoubtedly she had a rough time of it, if one may judge the character of the villain with the fez. Well, we must find her. There's no use inquiring here. If they have used this room for a torture chamber, we'll get nothing out of them, and they'll grow suspicious."

They went down stairs, and, while Valeska waited in the street, Astro drove a bargain with Garbon Soumissin. Luckily the lower hall was dark, and the Turk could not perceive Astro's oriental countenance. But the Master of Mysteries had an important piece of news to tell when he rejoined Valeska.

"They were talking Arabic, or rather Turkish. I heard one of them quote the motto we saw on the dagger. Now I know what they are. Have you heard of the Hunchakists?"

The papers had been so full of one of the recent murders of this dreaded Armenian society, that Valeska knew roughly what the name implied.

"Every country seems to have its guerrilla assassins," said Astro, as they drove up town. "But the Armenian Hunchakists are more dangerous than any of the others, because they are better organized. Their object is usually extortion. Now we must visit the rug merchants. I'm afraid we're on the track of something serious this time."

THEIR route led them directly into the heart of the mystery. On Eighteenth-st., where, in front of a Turkish rug store, the crescent of Turkey hung out, there was a great crowd gathered, pressing about the entrance. It took Astro little time to discover the cause of the disturbance. The merchant, Marco Dyorian, had been found, when his shop was opened by his head bookkeeper, lying in a pool of blood in his office, shot in the back. He was not dead, though mortally wounded and unconscious. He was now at the hospital, at the point of death.

A policeman guarded the door, preventing anyone from entering. Astro and Valeska caught sight of his helmet over the heads of the bystanders, and when the crowd eddied they saw his face.

"Why, it's McGraw!" "So it is!" said Astro. "What luck!"

They squirmed their way through the crowd, to find the burly police officer who with Astro's assistance had been able to gain considerable reputation in connection with the Macdougall-st. dynamite outrage, with whom he was now fast friends. Indeed, McGraw owed his lieutenant's cap to the help of the Master of Mysteries. He therefore welcomed them both with a grin.

"What is the straight of this, McGraw?" Astro asked.

"Hunchakist murder, sure!" responded the lieutenant.

"I thought as much. Who did it?" "Oh, we got 'em all right this time. No thanks

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